



India & its Sex Ratio

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Why in News

Recently, C Rangarajan (former Chairman, Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council) argued that there is an urgent need to reach young people **both for reproductive health education and services** as well as **to cultivate gender equity norms**.

His arguments are based on the **Sample Registration System (SRS) Statistical Report (2018)** and **United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA) State of World Population 2020**.

SRS Report

- SRS is the **largest demographic sample survey** in the country that among other indicators provide direct estimates of **sex ratio, fertility rate etc.** through a nationally representative sample.
- It is brought by the **Office of Registrar General**.

United Nation Population Fund

The UNFPA is **aimed at improving reproductive and maternal health** worldwide. It is headquartered in **New York**.

Key Points

- **Sex Ratio at Birth:**

- Biologically normal sex ratio at birth is 1,050 males to 1,000 females or **950 females to 1,000 males**.
- The SRS Report 2018 shows that sex ratio at birth in India, **declined marginally from 906 in 2011 to 899 in 2018**.

Sex ratio is measured as the number of females per 1,000 males.

- The **UNFPA State of World Population 2020 estimated the sex ratio at birth in India as 910**, which is on the lower side of index.
- This is a cause for concern because this adverse ratio results in a gross imbalance in the number of men and women and its inevitable impact on marriage systems as well as other harms to women.

- **Total Fertility Rate (TFR):**

- According to SRS Report 2018, TFR has been declining in India for some time now. It **declined from 2.4 to 2.2 during the period between 2011 and 2018**.
 - In 2011, 10 states had a fertility rate **below the replacement rate**. This increased to 14 states in 2020.
 - Fertility is likely to continue to decline and it is estimated **that replacement TFR of 2.1 would soon be reached for India** as a whole.
 - **TFR** is the number of children a mother would have at the current pattern of fertility during her lifetime.
 - **Replacement rate** is the average number of children born per woman—at which a population exactly replaces itself from one generation to the next, without migration.
- **Many people believe that the population would stabilise** or begin to reduce in a few years once replacement fertility is reached.
- **However, this is not so** because of the **population momentum effect**, a result of more people entering the reproductive age group of 15-49 years due to the **past high-level of fertility**.

For instance, the replacement fertility level was reached in Kerala around 1990, but its annual population growth rate was 0.7% in 2018, nearly 30 years later.

- **Challenges Involved:**

- **Regressive Mindset:** There is **considerable son preference** in all states, except possibly in **Kerala and Chhattisgarh**. This son's preference is derived from a regressive mindset. **E.g.:** People associate girls with dowry.
- **Misuse of Technology:** Cheaper technology like ultrasound helps in sex selection.
- **Failure in Implementation of Law:** The **Prenatal Conception and Prenatal Determination Act (PC-PNDT), 1994** which punishes healthcare professionals for telling expectant parents the sex of a child with imprisonment and hefty fines, has failed to control the sex selection.

Reports found **major gaps in the training of personnel implementing PC-PNDT**. Poor training meant that they were **unable to prepare strong cases against violators** to secure convictions.

- **Illiteracy:** Illiterate women in the reproductive age group of 15-49 years have higher fertility than literate women.

- **Government Initiative- Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme:**

- The sharp decline in **sex ratio** as pointed by Census 2011 data called for urgent action. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme was launched in 2015 in Panipat, Haryana **to address the issue of decline in child sex ratio** and related issues of empowerment of girls and women over a life cycle continuum.
- It is a **triministerial effort** of the ministries of Women and Child Development, Health & Family Welfare and Human Resource Development (now Ministry of Education).

- **Suggestions Made:**

- Increasing **female education and economic prosperity** will help to improve the ratio.
- Rollout campaigns on **sensitisation towards women and children**, making **women safety cells**, ensuring the **safety of women on public transport systems**, making **cyber-crime cells** are some other initiatives that need to be taken.
- In view of the complexity of son preference resulting in gender-biased sex selection, government actions need to be supplemented by **improving women's status in the society**.
- Reaching out to young people could reduce the effect of population momentum and accelerate progress towards reaching a more normal sex-ratio at birth.

Way Forward

- Despite several policies and programmes, lower health outcomes for women and girl children still persist in India. Certain forms of discrimination, especially the son preference, reinforced by the techno-economic forces are eliminating the girl child (even from the womb).

- Effective implementation of the existing women- and children-related policies, including **women's property ownership**, are required to empower women, to ensure girl child's survival, and to reduce gender gap in access to healthcare.

Source: IE